

Caring for Missourians: Statewide effort to increase healthcare workers

An appropriation of \$34 million enabled Missouri's public universities to increase the number of health professional graduates by approximately 20 percent. After five years, this equates to approximately 500 additional health care professionals annually, including 31 physicians, 30 pharmacists, about 300 nurses and allied health professionals, such as respiratory therapists and physical therapists.

Our public higher education institutions have a special responsibility to the state to provide access to quality educational programs for Missouri's future health care providers. They are a major source of physicians, nurses, dentists, optometrists, pharmacists and an array of allied health professionals. By increasing the number of graduates in our health care programs, Missourians will experience improved health, quality of life and economic productivity.

Need

- Missouri is experiencing shortages in health care fields:
 - Physicians: Almost 95 percent of Missouri counties are designated as underserved.
 - Nursing: Almost a 20 percent shortage of nurses is predicted by 2015.
 - Pharmacy: A critical shortage of up to 700 pharmacists is predicted before 2012.
 - Dentistry: Almost 93 percent of Missouri counties are considered dental shortage areas.
- The shortage of health care providers is particularly acute in Missouri. The following conditions will put a significant strain on health-related services:
 - Missouri ranks 14th in the nation in the number of people over the age of 65, and they will require greater medical care as they age;
 - Population studies reveal extremely high rates of obesity, smoking and chronic illness;
 - Missouri has underserved populations in both rural and urban areas. Health care provider shortages in these areas make it difficult to make appropriate health care decisions and will require different solutions designed to address this population's unique needs.
- Communities are reporting difficulties filling open health care professional positions – these open positions are a drain on the local economy. Local health care facilities are often forced to utilize high-cost “contract” health providers or reduce services.
- Most of the health care education programs have reduced or restricted the number of admitted students because of funding limitations. Public higher education institutions can no longer meet the state's health care workforce needs.
- The appropriation was designed to provide more than 500 additional health care professionals each year from the state's 4-year public higher education institutions.